

## Community and Society Archive

Welcome to **Community and Society** where you will find the latest thoughts and reflections by CLAL faculty and associates on the changing nature of community and society in America today and on the challenges and opportunities these changes represent for the Jewish people in America at the dawn of a new century. Every other week you will find something new and (hopefully) engaging here!

To access the **Community and Society Archive**, click [here](#).

Our authors are especially interested in hearing your responses to what they have written. So after reading, visit the **Community and Society Discussion Forum** where you can join in conversation with CLAL faculty and other readers.

To join the conversation at **Community and Society Talk**, click [here](#).



### Is it Kosher to Light a Mickey Mouse Menorah?

**By Daniel S. Brenner**

Should a deeply spiritual, politically conscious holiday be celebrated by sticking candles into Goofy's head?

The latest in a growing number of theme menorahs, the popular Disney Menorah presents an interesting case study in the limits between secular life and religious art. With thousands of American Jews uttering the blessing "L'hadlick ner shel Donald Duck," shouldn't we be concerned?

It is best to remember that this isn't the first time that ritual objects have been marked by allusions to corporate entities. Who could forget the Maxwell House Haggadah? Ever seen a New York Knicks or Barney the Dinosaur yarmulka? Somehow these objects slipped into ritual life without much of a fight.

But the popularity of Disney chanukiot represents a new level of syncretism

between the sacred and the commercial. Leaving aside the troubling history of Walt Disney's anti-Jewish sentiment, the new Disney Menorah sends a positive message to Jewish children. Children get to see their favorite characters as Jews! Yes, Mickey and Minnie were Jewish all along! Who knew? Well, Minnie is a Jewish name.

But seriously, having their holiday affirmed by America's pop culture icons is an overwhelmingly positive re-enforcer of Jewish identity in children. The popularity of the Rugrats' holiday videos has proven this tenfold. And isn't Mickey a wonderful holiday symbol? It is no surprise that the most prevalent icon on the national AIDS quilt was the mouse himself--symbol of happiness, magic, and childhood dreams.

American Jewry has undergone a transformation as we have gained wider acceptance in the marketplace. Adam Sandler's "Chanukah Song" is on commercial radio nationwide. Hallmark's Chanukah section has grown to become a division of the company. These days "Happy Holidays" has replaced "Merry Christmas." All this is quite miraculous, reflecting one of the tales of Chanukah we repeat each year--the story of a tiny people whose light burns strong. Religious freedom in America is not something to take for granted.

But what if the Chanukah tale we are trying to send to our children is that sometimes we must struggle to uphold our values against an often misguided secular world? The Maccabees defended an ethical and religious tradition that presented a challenge to the popular entertainments of their day. Shouldn't our celebration somehow connect to this theme?

So, is it kosher to light a Mickey Mouse menorah? Sure. This Chanukah I hope that adults and children alike enjoy sticking candles in Goofy's head. But I also hope that the simple wisdom of Chanukah is not lost--the wisdom that underneath the hype of any age is a contemplative life that offers deep joy.

[Click here](#) to view this week's other Community and Society feature: Shari Cohen on Bach, Talmud and Civic Engagement.



To join the conversation at Community and Society Talk, click [here](#).

To access the Community and Society Archive, click [here](#).



Copyright c. 2000, CLAL - The National Jewish Center  
for Learning and Leadership. All rights reserved. Reproduction  
in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.